Dear child care providers,

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) acknowledges that as the pandemic evolves, it continues to be challenging for child care providers, children and their families. Information changes quickly and OPH is committed to supporting you and providing updates when new information becomes available. Child care programs have remained open throughout the pandemic and are an important space for learning and healthy child development. They are also a critical support for essential and front line workers. There are many layers of protection in place for both staff and children. Child care settings continue to do a great job following guidance and limiting transmission.

New provincial guidance means there are new practices for isolation within schools and child care. The current situation means that the level of the COVID-19 Omicron variant in our community is very high. The chances that child care providers, children and their families could be exposed to COVID-19 in the community have increased. Keeping COVID-19 out of child care by following public health measures is as important as ever. With COVID-19 in our community and changes in access to testing, we need to treat possible COVID-19 symptoms as if they are a COVID-19 infection.

Please read this letter carefully as it explains key changes made by the Ontario government regarding child care, which are different from the information found in the January 5th, 2022 newsletter. This letter also provides important information on topics such as screening, isolation, and COVID-19 vaccination.

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) strongly recommends everyone to:

- screen themselves daily,
- stay home if unwell,
- assess personal risks when leaving the house,
- pause non-essential indoor gatherings with people outside of your household, regardless of vaccination status, and
- get vaccinated or boosted when eligible.

Screening for Symptoms
To decrease the spread of COVID-19, screen for symptoms daily and stay home when you or a member of your household is sick OR if you have been told to isolate as a close contact. Please follow the instructions in the provincial screening tool for schools and child care and visit Ontario.ca/exposed for more information as isolation requirements have been updated and may be different from information provided previously.

Isolation instructions for individuals with symptoms of COVID-19:
The isolation instructions have changed this year! In response to the rapidly spreading Omicron variant, the Ministry of Health has updated the isolation requirements including staying
home if you, your child or a household member has even one symptom. Isolation requirements may differ depending on symptoms, vaccination status and a person’s age.

OPH has developed this self-isolation flowchart to show how long you or a child needs to isolate.

COVID-19 Testing

Provincial eligibility for COVID-19 PCR testing has changed. To see if you or a child are eligible for PCR or Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) visit COVID-19 Testing Information.

The supply of RAT tests is subject to availability in the child care setting.

The Ministry of Education announced that beginning the week of January 17, 2022, RAT’s will be provided to the child care community. Child care staff and children will be able to use these tests if they develop symptoms. A positive rapid antigen test is highly indicative that the individual has COVID-19 and should self-isolate and follow the instructions found on Ontario.ca/exposed. A symptomatic individual with a single negative result on a rapid antigen test should continue to self isolate. However, if this individual gets a second negative result on their next rapid antigen test 24-48 hours later, they are less likely to have COVID-19 and can end their isolation when symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours (48 hours for gastrointestinal symptoms).

If you test positive you must reach out to your close contacts to notify them that they were exposed and may be required to self-isolate. Individuals only exposed at child care with all public health measures in place may not be considered close contacts. However, depending on the nature and frequency of interactions and the precautions in place, a person who tests positive may identify close contacts in their child care setting.

For more information, please consult the OPH web page Information for those who have symptoms, test positive for COVID-19 and high-risk contacts.

COVID-19 Vaccination

Vaccination is key to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and to reduce the severity of illness. While children under 5 years are not currently eligible for COVID-19 immunizations, ensuring that everyone who has regular contact with them is protected, is important. There are many opportunities to support and offer prioritized immunization against COVID-19 for child care staff.

Appointments are available for those who have not yet received their vaccine, with child care providers being prioritized. Visit the COVID-19 Vaccine or COVID-19 Vaccination and Children 5 to 11 years old webpages for more information, to review eligibility and to book an appointment for you or your child. OPH is increasing drop-in eligibility at certain community clinics. For the latest updates, visit OPH’s clinic information page.

It is important to note that all of the COVID-19 vaccines currently approved are effective at reducing the risk of serious illness, hospitalization, and death, and will help control the spread of COVID-19 in the community.
Process for COVID-19 Cases in Child Care

The Ministry of Education has committed to supporting child care with a broad range of health and safety measures. These measures include: stricter screening requirements, making non-fit tested N95 masks available to all child care staff, ventilation improvements, and other restrictions to reduce contacts in the child care. With all these safety measures in place, the aim is to limit exposure to others in the child care setting. Please note there may be circumstances where individuals could be notified of a high risk exposure depending on the nature and frequency of the interaction.

Please read the following information relating to this update:

- **Families should continue to call the child care to let them know that a member of your household will not be going to child care if they do not pass the self-screening tool (e.g., the child has symptoms).**
- **Childcare providers should continue to monitor absences** and report elevated absenteeism rates to OPH to facilitate assessment and implementation of additional measures, if appropriate.
- **Families do NOT need to notify the child care or OPH if a member of the household tests positive on a PCR or RAT test, however cases should notify their own contacts and advise them to isolate**
- **Families will no longer get letters from OPH stating that a person tested positive at child care. If a family is isolating due to a positive test result and they are concerned that there may be contacts in the child care setting, they may reach out to the childcare provider. OPH is developing tools to assist childcare providers in identifying contacts and passing on the message to contacts in a childcare setting.**
- **Any dismissals or closures of a child care will be determined by the child care operator (i.e., for operational reasons).**
- **If you or a member of your household tests positive on a PCR COVID-19 test, you may be called by OPH. You do not need to call OPH.**
  - OPH will ask you to reach out to your high-risk contacts to notify them that they were exposed and may be required to self-isolate. Depending on the nature and frequency of interactions, this could include people at child care.

**Ongoing safety measures** in addition to the updates shared above include wearing a well fitted 3-layer mask at child care, keep physical distance as much as possible, and exercise proper hand hygiene.

**SAVE THE DATE: Town Hall with Dr. Vera Etches**

OPH, in collaboration with Children’s Services are pleased to invite you to join a townhall event with Dr. Vera Etches for all child care providers in Ottawa.

**Date:** Friday January 21, 2022  
**Time:** 10:00 am to 11:00 am

Further details and a web-link to join will be communicated to you shortly.
Reaching Out for Help

As the pandemic continues, we are aware that many families may be struggling. This has not been easy. You are not alone. Please reach out if you need help.

- Call 2-1-1 or visit 211Ontario.ca to find out about financial and social support during COVID-19
- Need help paying for food and or housing? Visit the Ontario Government website to find help.
- Having trouble isolating safely in your own home? See Ottawa’s voluntary isolation centre for more information.
- Trying to find the right mental health and addiction care services for you or your child? Visit 1Call1Click.ca to get connected.
- If you need immediate help, call:
  - The Ottawa Distress Line/ Help Line at 613-238-3311
  - The Mental Health Crisis Line at 613-722-6914

Please know that help is available, and OPH encourages you to reach out for support when you need it. Please see resources available on the website: Mental Health and COVID-19.

Thank you for continuing to do your part during this COVID-19 pandemic and continuing to support each other as we face these challenging times together.

Sincerely,

Ottawa Public Health